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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

of

Michael James Pratt

Scott Kendrick Warner

and

Joseph Christensen

for

POCKET CLOSURE DEVICE

KIRTON & McCONKIE, A PROFESSIONAL CORP.

ATTORNEYS AT LAW

1800 Eagle Gate Tower

60 East South Temple

Salt Lake City, UT 84111-1004

Telephone: (801) 328-3600

Facsimile: (801) 321-4893

1. **Field of the Invention**

The present invention relates to pocket closure devices for facilitating retention of and access to items placed therein. Particularly, the present invention relates to a pocket closure device on a golf bag pocket for selectively retaining golf accessories.

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2. **Background**

Various bags are known in the art to facilitate the transport of smaller items. These include purses, knapsacks, backpacks, duffel bags, luggage, and specialty bags. A golf bag, for example, has become an indispensable part of any golfer's inventory. Typically, a golf bag includes one or more pockets for storing smaller golf accessories such as balls, tees, golf gloves, ball markers, divot repair tools, rain gear and windbreakers. Each pocket has an opening through which one may place items in and retrieve items from. A zipper normally closes the opening.

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A zipper, however, is often undesirable due to the time and effort required to actuate the zipper as needed to effectively retrieve and/or retain an item. As the game of golf requires frequent access to golf accessories contained within golf bag pockets, a zipper is often particularly undesirable as applied to golf bag pockets. Indeed, a pocket having a zipper requires that the zipper be actuated in one direction to retrieve an item from the pocket, and then actuated in the opposite direction to effectively retain any items remaining therein. Similarly, where the retrieved item is replaced in the pocket, the zipper must be first actuated to open the pocket, and again actuated to close the pocket. Thus, for any particular item that must be retrieved from the pocket and later replaced, a user must actuate the associated zipper a total of four times.

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In addition, a zipper is prone to mechanical failure. Indeed, the zipper may become deformed from use and wear over time, or may become caught in the surrounding fabric, thus rendering the zipper ineffective at least temporarily. The tendency for mechanical failure is exacerbated where a zipper is implemented around the perimeter of a pocket or where the pocket is irregularly shaped, such that the zipper requires actuation over or around a curve.

Accordingly, what is needed is a pocket closure device that facilitates quick and easy access to items contained within a pocket. What is also needed is a pocket closure device that minimizes a risk of mechanical failure of the device. Further what is needed is a pocket closure device that automatically and effectively secures pocket contents.

Such devices are disclosed and claimed herein.

SUMMARY AND OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a pocket closure device for facilitating retention of and access to items placed in a pocket. Specifically, certain embodiments of the present invention comprise an elongate resilient member laterally disposed along a pocket and
5 attached to a front panel of the pocket and to an outer surface of a golf bag. The elongate resilient member is operationally connected to the front panel and may be selectively biased to open the pocket in a single movement. In addition, the potential energy harnessed by so biasing the resilient member causes the resilient member to automatically seal the pocket opening when the biasing force is removed.

10 A handle element may be provided to facilitate biasing the front panel of the pocket, as discussed above, to quickly and easily access its contents. A handle element may be incorporated into the elongate resilient member at an attachment point on the pocket. Alternatively, a handle element may reside independently on the front panel of the pocket.

15 A grip element may be incorporated into the front panel of the pocket to facilitate leverage and transport of the bag. According to certain embodiments of the present invention, a grip element may comprise a flap coupled to an outer surface of the front panel of a pocket that has dimensions sufficient to accommodate a hand of a user. In this manner, a user may use the grip element to leverage the bag on one end, while using a
20 second hand to support the opposite end of the bag.

A guard element may extend over an opening of the pocket to further protect pocket contents. The guard element may be attached to the pocket itself, or to an outer surface of a golf bag or other item to which the pocket is attached such that the guard

element extends over the pocket opening. In selected embodiments, the guard element may be selectively actuated, and may be removable.

Further, a pocket may incorporate drainage apertures to facilitate cleaning, ventilating and/or draining the pocket.

5 As the present invention provides a mechanical pocket closure device that utilizes principles of potential energy to provide access to and retention of pocket contents, the present invention avoids the problems of the prior art while improving the security and accessibility of pocket contents.

10 An object of the present invention is to provide a pocket closure device that facilitates quick and easy access to items contained within a pocket.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a pocket closure device that minimizes a risk of mechanical failure of the device.

A further object of the present invention is to provide a pocket closure device that automatically and effectively secures pocket contents.

15 These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be set forth or will become more fully apparent in the description that follows. The features and advantages may be realized and obtained by means of the instruments and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims. Furthermore, the features and advantages of the invention may be learned by the practice of the invention or will be
20 obvious from the description, as set forth hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order that the manner in which the above-recited and other advantages and features of the invention are obtained, a more particular description of the invention briefly described above will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments thereof which are illustrated in the appended drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a front perspective view of a pocket and pocket closure device in a first closed position in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention;

Figure 2 illustrates a side view of the pocket and pocket closure device of Figure 1 in a second open position;

Figure 3A illustrates a front perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a pocket and pocket closure device in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention in a first closed position;

Figure 3B illustrates a front perspective view of an alternative embodiment of a pocket and pocket closure device in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention in a second closed position;

Figure 4 illustrates a perspective view of a pocket and pocket closure device in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention implemented in connection with a golf bag;

Figure 5 illustrates a perspective view of a pocket closure device in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention implemented in connection with a backpack; and

Figure 6 illustrates a method for facilitating retention of and access to items
5 placed in a bag in accordance with certain embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes that come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

The presently preferred embodiments of the invention will be best understood by reference to the drawings wherein like parts are designated by like numerals throughout.

As used in this specification, the term “pocket” refers to any enclosure, pouch, receptacle or container capable of receiving and retaining at least one item. The term “zipper” refers to a fastener consisting of two rows of metal or plastic teeth on strips of tape and a sliding piece that closes an opening by drawing the teeth together. The term “traditional locking device” refers to any zipper, snap, button, clasp, buckle or any other traditional device known to those in the art by which to secure pocket contents.

Referring now to Figures 1 and 2, an enclosure device in accordance with the present invention may comprise a pocket 2 having at least one opening 4. A pocket 2 may comprise a front panel 6, a back panel 8, side panels 10, and a bottom support panel 12. Alternatively, a pocket 2 may comprise simply a front panel 6 that adjoins a back panel 8 to create an enclosed space having an opening 4 at one or more edges. In addition, a back panel 8 may comprise a surface of an item on which the pocket 2 is implemented. A pocket closure device in accordance with the present invention may be implemented in connection with a pocket 2 on a golf bag, a backpack, luggage, or any

other bag or item known to those in the art having dimensions sufficient to accommodate the present pocket closure device.

The pocket closure device of the present invention comprises biasing means 14 attached to a front panel 6 of a pocket 2 and to a larger bag or item on which the pocket 2 is implemented. Biasing means 14 may comprise plastic, metal, or any elastomeric or other material known to those in the art capable of being biased to harness potential energy. Biasing means 14 may extend from a first point of attachment 20 beyond a lower edge of the pocket 2 to a second point of attachment on a front panel 6 of the pocket 2.

In one embodiment of the present invention, biasing means 14 comprise an elongate resilient member that is substantially U-shaped. The U-shape is defined by two open ends 16, side portions 17, and an adjoining bridge portion 18 such that the bridge portion 18 may be coupled to the pocket front panel 6 and each open end 16 may be biased against either side of the pocket 2 beyond a lower edge of the pocket 2. In this manner, the resilient member substantially seals the pocket opening 4 in a first closed position automatically, absent application of an opposing force. A user may apply force to re-direct the resilient member away from the back panel 8 of the pocket 2 according to a second open position, such that the user may thereby access the pocket opening 4. Once such force is removed, however, the potential energy effectively harnessed by the resilient member in the second open position causes the resilient member to immediately spring back to the first closed position. In this manner, the enclosure device of the present invention automatically and effectively seals the pocket opening 4 upon access, thereby securing the contents contained therein without requiring a traditional locking device.

According to certain embodiments of the present invention, a handle element 24 may be implemented in connection with the biasing means 14 to facilitate access to pocket contents. A handle element 24 may comprise a finger pull, a cross bar, or any other means known to those in the art by which to facilitate application of an opposing
5 force to biasing means 14. One embodiment of a handle element 24 in accordance with the present invention comprises a cross bar integrally formed with the biasing means 14, such that a user may grip and pull the cross bar to directly effectuate a second open position. As discussed above, the cross bar need only be released to effectively and automatically re-seal the pocket opening 4 in its first closed position.

10 A pocket 2 may optionally incorporate a grip element 26 to facilitate leverage and transport of an item on which it is implemented. In particular, a grip element 26 may be integrated onto a front panel 6 of a pocket 2 on a bag such that a user may leverage one end of the bag by way of the grip element 26 while supporting a second end of the bag with the other hand. A grip element 26 may comprise a flap coupled to an outer surface
15 of the front panel 6 of a pocket that comprises dimensions sufficient to accommodate a hand of a user. In this manner, a user may insert his hand under the flap to leverage the bag on one end while supporting the other end of the bag with the other hand.

Alternatively, a grip element 26 may comprise a cross bar or other mechanical device coupled to the pocket 2 to facilitate leveraging the bag.

20 Referring now to Figure 3, certain embodiments of the present invention comprise a guard element 30 attached proximate an opening 4 of the pocket 2 to further protect the pocket and its contents. A guard element may comprise a plastic or plastic coated material or any other material known to those in the art capable of repelling or preventing

moisture or contaminants from entering an enclosed space defined by pocket 2. A guard element 30 may be integrated into a surface or edge of the pocket 2 such that the guard element 30 may be selectively actuated to substantially cover the pocket opening 4. For example, a guard element 30 may comprise a flap attached to a back panel 8 of the pocket 2, wherein the flap may be selectively positioned to cover any space between the back panel 8 and a front panel 6 of the pocket 2 when the pocket 2 is in a first closed position. Alternatively, a guard element 30 may be integrated into or attached to an outer surface 53 of a bag 50 or other item to which the pocket 2 is attached. In one embodiment, the guard element 30 may comprise a substantially rigid structure to direct moisture or contaminants away from a pocket opening 4. A guard element 30 may further incorporate removable attachment means 32 to render the guard element 30 selectively attachable to either an outer surface 53 of a golf or other bag or to the pocket 2. For example, removable attachment means 32 may comprise a hook and loop material, snaps, rivets, or any other material known to those in the art capable of being selectively and repeatedly implemented.

Embodiments of the present invention may also integrate drainage apertures 34 into at least a portion of a surface area of a pocket 2. Preferably, drainage apertures 34 are incorporated into at least a bottom support panel 12 to facilitate cleaning, ventilation and/or moisture release when the bag on which the pocket 2 is implemented is in a substantially upright position. Drainage apertures 34 may also be implemented in front 6 and side 10 panels of a pocket 2, as well as a back panel 8, where the back pocket panel 8 is independent of an outer surface 53 of a bag on which the pocket 2 is implemented.

Referring now to Figure 4, a pocket closure device in accordance with the present invention may be implemented in connection with a bag 50 having a top end 51, a bottom end 52, an outer surface 53, and a housing 56. A bag 50 may further comprise a shoulder transport assembly 58 to facilitate manual transport of the bag 50. In certain

5 embodiments, the pocket 2 is preferably located proximate a bottom end 52 of the bag 50. Where the pocket 2 is so located, biasing means 14 may be attached to a front panel 6 of the pocket 2 and to an outer surface 53 of the bottom end 52 of the bag 50 substantially beyond the location of the pocket 2. In this manner, the biasing means 14 may seal a pocket opening 4 quickly and effectively without requiring a traditional locking device as

10 the biasing means 14 require deliberate application of force to open the pocket 2.

As discussed above, biasing means 14 may comprise a substantially U-shaped resilient member having two open ends 16, elongate side portions 17, and an adjoining bridge portion 18. According to a presently preferred embodiment of the present invention, each of the two open ends 16 may be secured to an outer surface 53 of the

15 bottom end 52 of the bag 50 such that the side 17 and adjoining bridge portions 18 lie substantially adjacent to a perimeter of the pocket 2. Side portions 17 of the resilient member may be retained substantially adjacent side panels 10 or lateral edges of a pocket 2 by a retaining element 54 affixed thereto. A retaining element 54 may be disposed intermittently or uniformly between the side portions 17 and the side panels 10 or lateral

20 edges of a pocket 2 to retain the side portions 17 in position. Similarly, a retaining element 54 may be implemented along a top edge of the front panel 6 of the pocket 2 to create an operational relationship between the adjoining bridge portion of the resilient member and the front pocket panel 6. A retaining element 54 may comprise an elongated

cavity integral to a perimeter of the pocket 2, or any other means known to those in the art by which to retain the side portions 17 substantially adjacent the pocket 2.

Referring now to Figure 5, the pocket closure device of the present invention may also be implemented in connection with a backpack, luggage or other equipment.

5 According to an embodiment of the present invention implemented in connection with a backpack 60, a first portion of a biasing member 14 may be attached to a front panel 6 of a pocket 2 as discussed above with reference to Figure 4. A second portion of the biasing member 14 may be attached to a frame of the backpack 60 or other equipment and offset from the pocket 2 to effectuate an automatic effective seal of the pocket opening 4 by
10 harnessing potential energy in the biasing member 14. A pocket closure device in accordance with the embodiment of the present invention depicted in Figure 5 may also implement any of a guard element 30, a handle element 24, a grip element 26 and/or drainage apertures 34 as discussed above with reference to Figures 1-4.

Referring now to Figure 6, a method of using a pocket closure device in
15 accordance with the present invention may comprise first providing a bag 70 having a pocket 2 attached to an outer surface thereof. A second step of the method may comprise coupling a first portion of a biasing member to a front panel of the pocket such that the biasing member and the pocket are operationally connected 72. Coupling a biasing member to the front panel 72 may further comprise disposing the biasing member
20 laterally adjacent the front panel 74 and attaching the first portion of the biasing member to an upper portion of the front panel proximate the pocket opening 76.

A third step in accordance with the present method may comprise attaching a second portion of a biasing member to the bag first provided 78. Attaching a second

portion of a biasing member to the bag 78 may optionally comprise attaching the second portion of the biasing member proximate a bottom end of the bag substantially beyond the position of the pocket 80 and off center with respect thereto. In this manner the first portion of the biasing member will be at least somewhat out of line with respect to the
5 second portion of the biasing member, thus creating potential energy that causes the biasing member to quickly and effectively seal the opening 4 of the pocket 2 without requiring any externally applied force or traditional locking device.

A fourth optional step of a method in accordance with the present invention may comprise attaching a handle member to either the biasing member or to a front panel of
10 the pocket to facilitate leveraging the pocket to access its contents 82. A fifth optional step of the present method may comprise integrating a grip element into the front panel of the pocket to facilitate leveraging the weight of the equipment or bag to which it is attached for purposes of balance and/or transport 84.

A sixth optional step of a method in accordance with the present invention may
15 comprise coupling a guard member to either of the pocket or an outer surface of the equipment or bag to which it is attached proximate a pocket opening to further safeguard the pocket contents 86. A seventh optional step of the present method may comprise providing at least one aperture in the pocket 2 for the purposes of cleaning, ventilation, and/or drainage.

20 The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit of essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims, rather than by the foregoing

description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed and desired to be secured by Letters Patent is: